

# Living & Being

FREE

July 2014

A GUIDE TO WELLNESS

## More than Massage

Alternative therapies  
enhance treatment

Some salt can be  
good for you

Overcome money conflicts  
in relationships

Prepare for surprises  
before hiking, biking

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# Living & Being

A GUIDE TO WELLNESS

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DARRYL BAUTISTA/LIVING & BEING

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Licensed massage therapist Mark Pukmel treats Holistic Guinea Pig Linda Freeman using a drum in his City of Poughkeepsie office.

DARRYL BAUTISTA/LIVING & BEING

# MASSAGE PLUS

Practitioner combines a range of modalities



LINDA FREEMAN  
THE HOLISTIC GUINEA PIG

Sometimes I like to scout practitioners, show up incognito and see what they have to offer before committing to a column. But after almost four years as the Holistic Guinea Pig, going incognito is harder.

When I showed up for an appoint-

ment with massage therapist Mark Pukmel, he exclaimed, "I thought that was you!" and pulled out all the stops. I emerged a full two hours later dizzy and dazzled. Never before had I experienced a massage that went beyond the physical and dipped into the spiritual. Pukmel combines a range of modalities, including sound healing and chakra balancing.

"I share whatever I feel called to do," he explained after that initial session. "In your case, I knew you would be open to anything."

A 2004 graduate of the Hudson Valley School of Massage Therapy, Pukmel felt drawn to continue his holistic studies and realized the benefit of incorporating what he was learning into a unique massage experience that offers both a physical and emotional release.

Pukmel has a long string of clients, many with chronic illnesses, whom he visits in their homes, as well as in his office in the historic Cunneen-Hackett building in Poughkeepsie. Pukmel is eager to have me experience his work, which means that each session is "more than a massage."

## The experience

Pukmel likes smudging, a ritualized burning of dried sage to purify the environment or bless a person. Because of the often powerful emotions released during his work, Pukmel sometimes smudges his office between clients. As a result, I follow



Licensed massage therapist Mark Pukmel treats Holistic Guinea Pig Linda Freeman in his City of Poughkeepsie office. Pukmel uses alternative therapies such as feathers, tuning forks and hot rocks as part of his treatment. DARRYL BAUTISTA/LIVING & BEING

my nose to his doorstep, where he welcomes me into his roomy office and then, after a brief conference, into the huge massage room. Drums line the wall, and crystals are grouped under the massage table. He invites me to undress to a comfortable level and slide under the blanket face down while he ducks out to wash his hands. The table is heated, and I sink into its comfort even before he returns. He puts a heating pad on my back and starts on my feet, working his way up. I'm happy that he spends a long time on my always achy neck and shoulders before asking me to turn over to work the front part of my body. By this time, my sinuses are blocked. He rubs my sinuses with peppermint oil to open my nasal passages. Then, just where a traditional massage would end, his continues. He drops an eye pillow over my closed lids and lines my center with crystals. He starts beating drums and tinkling bells, and I drift off. When I return to my physical body, if not quite my senses, two hours have passed.

## RESOURCES

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## Session two

"Chakra is a Sanskrit word meaning wheel or vortex," Pukmel wrote me regarding today's Chakra Tuning session. "These chakras, or energy centers, function as pumps or valves, regulating the flow of energy through our system. There are seven chakras, each has specific colors, sounds and emotions. The root chakra is at the base of the spine, the second at the lower abdomen, third at the solar plexus, fourth at the heart, fifth at the throat, sixth is the eye and seventh is top of the head."

Today, Pukmel will use tuning forks to balance them.

But I show up with back pain, so Pukmel quickly adjusts his plan. He massages using a thick application of Topricin cream, which contains arnica. Then he uses not only his hands but a massager as well, which feels odd vibrating against my calf, but feels great on the soles of my feet, thighs and back. After this warm-up he massages. He works like no other massage therapist I've ever had, including moving each of my legs over on the table, curving my body so that he can work deeper into my aching side. This seems so logical I'm amazed no one else has ever done it. Then he asks me to move onto my side and pushes and pulls different parts of my body in a physical therapy manner. Then, he says, the physical part of the massage is over, and now the energy work will begin. He uses different tuning forks, each emitting unique vibrations, as he works his way up the

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## Massage

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chakras, tapping the fork and pressing it against me. It's a weird; I can feel the vibrations inside my body.

Soon after he begins, I must drift off because suddenly I am back in the room acutely aware of everything including my arms, which don't feel like my arms at all but two blocks of energy — they are buzzing, and I feel hot and a little like I am levitating. But the weirdest thing is that I feel a flapping on my stomach, as if a pendulum were going back and forth. At first I think he is waving his hand over me, but I can hear him by my head. So I decide he must have put a crystal on my stomach and the sensation must be caused by my breathing and the rise and fall of my belly. But when I ask him afterward he says he had nothing on my stomach. He closes the session with drumming, which I can also feel reverberating inside my body.

"I've been using tuning forks in my work for seven years now and they are a wonderful way to clear the chakras and allow discordant and blocked energy to pass freely," Pukmel explains to me as we relax over tea after our session. Contrary to our first session where I felt like my mind was mush afterward, now I feel energized and chatty. "A tuning fork session can raise energy levels to combat disease, align and energize the chakra system, connect higher self to lower bodies of consciousness, quiet the mind to allow the spirit to soar, calm the body to deepen meditation and balance emotional states," he explains. So tuning chakra restore everything to its optimum state.

### Session three

By now, I've learned that the only thing to expect at a Pukmel massage is that I shouldn't plan on doing anything else afterward. I've also learned that I have to book ahead because he is often visiting clients. At our third session, he wants to share his myofascial techniques. Myofascial is a form of massage that works directly on stretching the fascia. Fascia was once described to me as plastic wrap covering our muscles. Sometimes it becomes too



Licensed massage therapist Mark Pukmel treats Holistic Guinea Pig Linda Freeman in his City of Poughkeepsie office. DARRYL BAUTISTA/LIVING & BEING

tight. Myofascial is a therapeutic technique to bring our muscles back to peak movement. Pukmel does things like hang one of my legs off the edge of the table and pull. It feels a bit like physical therapy. None of it is painful. As he's working on me I realize that I'm missing the deep relaxation of the drumming, so I'm relieved when he drops the eye pillow over my eyes and starts. He also places crystals on my belly, solar plexus and chest. He ends by fanning me with feathers. Finally I smell sage burning and he "smudges" me.

### Session four

All winter I've been looking forward to the hot stone massage. The stones are warmed in a special unit. He places stones everywhere, large ones in each hand and small ones between my toes. Then he runs the smooth stone against my skin, allowing the heat to penetrate the muscles. It feels great. This session is all about warmth and comfort and includes a warm wet towel over my face. Again he ends with drumming.

### The bottom line

"Some people only want a traditional massage, so that's exactly

what I'll do," Pukmel told me after one of our sessions. "When I first tried to share this type of work, I brought it to a woman who'd been a weekly client for years. Afterward she told me to never do it again, and I realized not everyone is ready or open to it. I respect that."

As for me, I have often intended to simply melt away during a massage, but my mind wouldn't let me. The key to relaxation is the ability to move beyond the physical state, which is exactly what Pukmel's form of massage does. "Sound and vibration such as the tuning forks, drum, Tibetan bowls, rattles induces changes in emotion, mood, energy level, perception and thought patterns. It can heighten your awareness and energy," Pukmel told me.

Since emotional pain can be the cause of physical pain, I was surprised that the idea of incorporating both aspects of release into a massage never occurred to me before. Adding drumming and vibration was soothing and the tuning produced energy I felt for days after.

Now I don't know if a traditional massage will ever feel quite complete again.

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